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Confirmation Hearings of Secretary of Defense-Designate

Caspar Weinberger

Senate Armed Services Committee

Washington, D. C.

SENATOR JOHN TOWER: ...We will proceed to questions. I'll reiterate that we will follow the ten minute rule, and I ask all my colleagues to please voluntarily stay within the ten minute rule.

Mr. Weinberger, there's been press speculation that your appointment signals some change in the defense policy of the incoming Reagan administration. There's been some suggestion that perhaps your views on defense and defense spending are not compatible with those expressed by Governor Reagan during the course of the campaign and that there might be some change in policy.

I'd like to give you the opportunity to present your views on the commitment of Governor Reagan to national defense and what you consider your own role to be, and whether or not indeed your views are compatible or incompatible with those expressed by Governor Reagan during the campaign.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE-DESIGNATE CASPAR WEINBERGER: Well, Senator, I feel there is full compatibility. I have talked with the Governor several times on the general subject and over the years and very recently. I think there is complete agreement that it is absolutely essential that we, first of all, improve the readiness, all aspects, really of the readiness of the forces that we now have. And I think that, simultaneously -- and it's hard to assign any priority between the two; I think we have to proceed simultaneously. We have to begin to improve the strategic balance between ourselves and the Soviet Union.

I think there has been a gap opened, and I think that gap has to be closed. And I think that both of these goals would be undertaken with the general purpose of trying to -- or have the goal of deterring anyone from taking any action that would be harmful to our nation or to its citizens. And from my point of view, this involves everything from acts of terrorism and violence against our diplomats and our citizens up to and including possible attacks on the nation itself. I think

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that only if we have the forces and the weapons, and only if we have the firmness and the resolution and the will to act when it's required, and, perhaps even more important, only if it's perceived by others that we have these strengths can we avoid the repeated actions that have been taken against our citizens and other problems that we're all familiar with that have been occurring too often in recent years.

As long as we are perceived by any potential enemy, or by our allies, for that matter, to be ill-equipped or weak or irresolute or guilt-ridden or unwilling or unable to do anything except be patient, then I think we can expect perhaps increasingly hostile actions against our people abroad, and, to my mind, actions that would weaken our position in the world. And we've seen a lot of these in Afghanistan and Angola and Iran and elsewhere.

I spoke of readiness. And I think that that's a sort of general term. But what I mean by readiness encompasses a very large number of things. We have forces in being. I think many of them are under-strength. I think that we've not had the fuel or the ammunition for full training. Certainly the compensation of the uniformed services I think has to be improved. I think we have to bring these existing units up to strength in performance and equipment and training. And I think that this would also require, this general aspect of improving readiness, that we, as an American people, again try to -- and this would be one of the very highest priorities that I would like to work on -- that the American people try to regain the respect and the honor and the appreciation that I think we should all feel for people in the uniform services.

This used to be the feeling of the country. I would very much like to see it again and would like to make this a very high priority of what I would propose to do in the next few years.

People in the uniforms are not militarists seeking glory abroad in a lot of bold and disastrous ventures. But they're shouldering, really, the burdens that enable us to continue to live in peace and freedom. And I think we should honor them for it.

As far as improving that strategic balance that I mentioned as a sort of simultaneous priority, not a second one, but a simultaneous priority, I think that involves starting and continuing various weapon systems that will give us sufficient strength so that anyone who plans a sort of attack will correctly perceive that we retain a full ability to respond, to deliver a return blow of such strength that they will be deterred from launching that kind of attack. And I think this requires that we conduct a very consistent policy of increasing our strength and that we conduct ourselves and our relations with all of our

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friends in such a way that they will believe and that they will join us to the utmost of their ability in securing the basic goal in which we all have an equal interest. And that, of course, is the maintenance of peace and freedom for us all.

Those would be the priorities or the philosophy, if you like, with which I would approach this task, if I should be confirmed.

SENATOR TOWER: Thank you very much, Mr. Weinberger. I'm delighted to note that your perception of priorities is very, very compatible with my own. I am particularly delighted that you recognize the necessity of addressing our manpower and personnel problems immediately, in that they do impact rather seriously on our state of readiness. And I'm delighted to see that you're prepared to take on that problem at the outset.

Senator Stennis.

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SENATOR TOWER: ...The Senator's time has expired. The Chair recognizes Senator Cannon.

SENATOR HOWARD CANNON: Thank you very much....

ANNOUNCER: ...So we now resume the questioning with Senator Cannon of Nevada.

SENATOR CANNON: ...formidable task. Our adversaries, the Soviets, are probing our resolve on many fronts. As a nation we've stood still for the past ten years because of our mistaken trust in the SALT process while the Soviets have pushed on in virtually every field. Wherever we look, there is reason to worry. A recent article in "Aviation Week" highlighted the sea trials of the Soviet's latest submarines, their Typhoon and Alpha class subs, which have twice the displacement of our latest Trident submarine. Not only are they twice as big, they're double hulled, with more than ten feet of separation between hulls filled with water, which, by all reports, makes them virtually impenetrable. Also, they reportedly are Titanium-hulled, can dive deeper and can outrun anything we have. In fact, the speed differential is so great it's alleged that our Mark-48 torpedo, our best and biggest, can't catch the Alpha sub.

Now one of the things that has made our nation great in the past has been our supremacy of the seas. As a maritime power, we were able to move wherever we needed in World War II, in Korea and in Vietnam. As an energy dependent nation, we need to maintain that capability to import raw materials, particularly oil. For the Soviets to field these new submarines, they had to start ten years or more ago. For us to do the same will take

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a similar lead time. In my view, this demonstrates the stealth of the Soviets and the fallacy of not insisting on on-site inspection in any of our SALT negotiations. To depend upon satellite surveillance is sheer nonsense. What we now need is a crash program to develop a missile of sufficient implosive power to nullify the new Soviet subs. Unless we do, we will witness a change in the balance of sea power and sea warfare.

Are you aware of this new threat? And if you are, is anything being done about it?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Well, Senator, I am aware of it as a result of recent briefings. And without commenting on the performance characteristics of the Soviet subs, I do think that this again illustrates one of the problems of the strategic imbalance that I mentioned a few moments ago when you were at another hearing that have to be redressed. And there's no question at all that these things do take a very long lead time and that when a lead of this kind, a strategic lead or a strategic imbalance is established, we then have to address the most rapid measures that will be effective in doing that.

And certainly one of the things, one of the options that would have to be examined very carefully and, if proven to be effective, brought on line as soon as possible, would be the implosive effect that you just mentioned. We have to secure that or some other means.

But this is the kind of development that has been taking place. And we have to, and, I'm sure, can match it.

SENATOR CANNON: Another area of concern is tank warfare. Now the British have developed a laminated armor consisting of steel and plastic plates that, according to newspaper articles, makes bazookas bounce off like pop corn. The Soviets have now adopted this technique. And so we need to develop hyper velocity kinetic energy penetrators to meet this new Soviet challenge.

Have you been briefed on this new development, and are we doing something about that?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Not on that one specifically. I have not, Senator. But I would certainly ask for it. And I would assume that we would have full briefings on all of those matters.

Again to get back to a point that I raised in connection with procurement earlier, we have had a tank in procurement for a very long time. And I would hope one way or another to try to shorten that time and, at the same time, secure the most effective weaponry possible. And if there's a new development of that kind that has been developed by the British, then I would

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certainly think that we would want to make every effort to share in that throughout the NATO system.

SENATOR CANNON: Of course, the additional areas that are of concern to me are the lasers and the particle beams which are very important that we move ahead on.

Now another question pertains to the triad missiles, the submarines and the strategic bombers. In the missile area, the MX is very much on my mind because of its impact on my home state of Nevada. There's a lot of speculation about the administration's intentions in reference to continued reliance on the Minuteman. Whatever's done should be decided promptly to avert any unwarranted delay.

Do you have any information on what is to be the status of the MX program?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: No, sir, not finally or conclusively. And that would involve, in the new administration, a rather full-scale presentation and discussion since it's a major issue, as you indicate, from a number of points of view, with the President. And I've not had the opportunity either to sufficiently educate myself or to have briefings of that kind.

But I am aware of a number of the issues involved. I don't have any doubt at this point that a strengthened missile of the MX type is necessary. I do think, as I indicated earlier, that the problem requires that we get some kind, some sort of protected site, some kind of site that can effectively be utilized without very earlier discovery and identification by the Soviets, and hence subjected to the same form of potential problem that some of the existing sites are that are now targetted.

SENATOR CANNON: This committee provided in the legislation that not more than 50% of the MX program could be located in any one area, namely Utah and Nevada, prior to a study of the split basing mode. And the report is due back to the committee by February 1st. Is that report on target, as far as you know?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: The Department has advised me that they are working on that report. I am not advised as to whether it is on target or not. But we could certainly find out for you.

SENATOR CANNON: Now the conference report on the FY 81 DOD Authorization Act states that the Secretary of Defense shall pursue full-scale engineering development of a strategic bomber with the ability to perform the missions of a conventional bomber, cruise missile platform and nuclear weapons delivery system in both the tactical and strategic role, with an initial operational capability of not later than 1987. Further, the Secretary shall submit a status report to the Committee on Armed Services of both

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houses by March the 15th, 1981, including comparisons of the B-1, derivatives of the B-1 and the FB 111 aircraft.

Now that certainly is going to be a big order. Of course the conference committee didn't expect a new Secretary of Defense when that order was written. But I think that this is an important matter that needs to be addressed. And I, for one certainly hope that you will be submitting that report on schedule by March the 15th.

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Well, my information is that that has slipped a bit by the department. I gather that there is a possibility of supplying some comparatively rough figures on the various options within a few weeks of the settle date, but that the detailed kind of figures which I would expect, and which I know the committee would expect, will be delayed a few months beyond that.

I will certainly make every effort, if I am confirmed and take office, to speed that up. But the information that I have at the moment is that there is likely to be some delay or some slippage in that particular requirement.

SENATOR CANNON: There is an article in the January 5th, '81 issue of Newsweek, captioned "A Soviet War of Nerves," and it talks about the Soviet subs moving dangerously close in August of '78 to the East Coast of the U. S., and thereby significantly raising the threat to five SAC bases along the East Coast from South Carolina to Maine, where B-52 and FB-111 bombers were stationed. And of course, General Ellis, the Commander of SAC, has recommended to this committee stretching the FB-111 fuselage as an interim measure now to provide some adequate capability in that area.

My time is up. I don't -- I was going to ask if you have any views on that.

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Well, that is one of the options. And another is to proceed with a modified B-1. And there are other options. And it is this, as I understand it, that the Department is now developing figures. But I am told that there may be more delay than I guess any of us would like to see. And I don't assign any blame or fault for this. But I would certainly regard it, as you say, as a major decision and one that ought to be made very quickly, because, again, in my view, decisions are extremely important, even if we don't get the very finest or latest of technologies that could be in.

I know that when I was running the budget a few years ago, seven or eight now, the B-1 was almost ready for production. And it was called back, to the best of my memory, for some redesign because some new technologies had become available. And the result

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is, as you know, we not only do not have it, we do not even have authorization for it any more.

So that I do think it's vital to get decisions and get them made and proceed on them. And what is being studied by the Department in response to the conference committee is the material necessary for such a decision.

SENATOR CANNON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR TOWER: This concludes the first round of questions....

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SENATOR TOWER: It's my understanding that Senator Levin has additional questions. Senator Levin?

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SENATOR CARL LEVIN: I have additional questions. I don't know if I have additional time. I think I could wind up in perhaps five more minutes, if I had that much time, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR TOWER: Go ahead and proceed. If you can, Senator, we'd like to wind up by 12:30. And that would obviate the necessity of a meeting this afternoon.

SENATOR LEVIN: Well, I'd be happy to cooperate with that. And my additional questions beyond that could be for the record.

As part of the equation which you look at to determine who's got more horsepower, I've looked at the following sources, our Department of Defense and the International Institute of Strategic Studies, on the military balance. And I'm going to now quote from their findings and wonder whether you agree with them in terms of the equation and in terms of that real gap, as you put it.

Would you agree that NATO, the NATO nations compared to the Warsaw Pact nations have about 200,000 more men under arms?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE: Well, Senator, I'm not really familiar with those specific studies that you cite. My impression is, on the basis of the briefings and the examination I've been able to make is that the ground forces facing the NATO nations -- the ground forces of the Soviet Union facing the NATO nations have superiority at the present time.

SENATOR LEVIN: In terms of numbers?

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SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: I'm sorry.

SENATOR LEVIN: In terms of numbers?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: No, in terms of overall effective strength.

SENATOR LEVIN: Let me just read you a few figures....

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Surely.

SENATOR LEVIN: ...to see if you quarrel with any of these or disagree with them.

In terms of anti-tank guided weapons, do you have any problem with this figure, that we have twice as many of them as do the Warsaw Pact nations?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: I'm not really in a position to comment on that. I think we have a very good capability and a very good actuality in anti-tank guided weapons at the moment. But again, there is a vastly -- there is a very large number of Soviet tanks that are capable of being brought to bear on the NATO forces.

SENATOR LEVIN: Well, sometimes we just look at the tanks and we don't look at the anti-tank weapons. And I'm wondering whether it's part of your review of that equation you've looked at the anti-tank weapons....

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Well, I do indeed, because I think what I have to look at is the means of redressing what I can this imbalance as quickly as possible. And I think that one of the ways you obviously would try to do that would be defensive weapons of this sort rather than trying to match tank production, which has a very large disparity.

SENATOR LEVIN: Running through just a few others and I'd just ask you the question at the end of the list, and this is just some samples. Those studies view our capacity of strategic and tactical airlift as superior, our capacity of amphibious lift vastly superior, our quality of tactical aircraft, especially in air-to-air modes, superior; the capabilities to replenish naval combatants superior; the numbers of major surface combatants, 400, compared to Warsaw Pact, 235; quality and reliability of allies, superior; lethality of our artillery and rockets, superior; numbers and quality of sea-based tactical aircraft and carriers for offensive strike missions, far superior. And I'm not going to go into all the rest. But I'm wondering whether or not you have any differences with those that you know of, and, if not, whether you've taken them into account.

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SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Well, Senator, I do have differences with some of those that you have mentioned. And it may be on the result of imperfect information or additional information that might change those views.

I do feel that there are some inferiorities in some of those categories in which you've cited the NATO nations, including ourselves, as having a superior capability. I would certainly want to examine it very closely. I would not want to rearm American on the basis of rumor, so to speak. I would certainly want to be as sure of our facts as we could be, and that's why I think our intelligence capability has to be improved.

But I would want to act decisively on the best information available. And I have to say that I do have some disagreements with those characterizations you've just quoted.

SENATOR LEVIN: Could you enumerate a couple for me?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Well, I would be a little surprised if the airlift capability that we would have is that much superior. I would be a little surprised about the effectiveness of combatant vessels. And again, I'm not as much interested in the total number of vessels as I am in what they can do and where they are and where they can be based and how effectively they can be brought to bear. And it's in those areas of effectiveness that I have some concern.

If someone has counted up the numbers on both sides and seems satisfied with the ratio of numbers, that's one thing. I'd like to go a lot further and find out what it is that those individual numbers can deliver and where and when and how accurately.

And so these would be the areas in which I would want to indicate some dissent from those conclusions. I hasten to add, however, that I haven't studied that particular report. I have had other briefings. And what I have found I find to be thus far quite disquieting. If there is other evidence, I'd like to see it too.

SENATOR LEVIN: Do you believe that we should have a statutory limit on the number of high school graduate that we recruit, that there be a required, fixed percentage of high school grads in the Army?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Generally, as I mentioned before on all of these things, I have suspicion of fixed quotas, of fixed percentages. I much prefer to look at the people involved and their own capabilities.

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SENATOR LEVIN: I think I better save the rest of the questions. There may be others who have questions, Mr. Chairman. I do have some for the record.

SENATOR TOWER: There are no other senators seeking the recognition.

SENATOR LEVIN: Then I'll use my last two minutes then, if that's all right with the chair.

Several times during the campaign, Governor Reagan stressed the need for more....

[Inaudible, off-mike comment, followed by Senator Stennis incorporating questions of Senator William Proxmire into the record.]

SENATOR LEVIN: Several times during the campaign, Governor Reagan stressed the need for more careful targetting of federal procurement to assist areas experiencing severe unemployment problems. And I'm wondering whether you share that concern?

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Well, I think that my understanding is that nearly a third of the recent Defense Department contracts were let in areas of unemployment, labor surplus, or however you want to phrase it. I think that it is a matter of concern, of course. In the final analysis, I don't think you can use the procurement process, and I don't think the Governor intends to use the procurement process, to redress a social problem. I do think that you have to use the procurement process to produce, at the least possible cost, the most effective and best equipment that we can have.

And quite frequently that can be done, as the recent experience has demonstrated, with nearly a third of the contracts going to areas where there is high unemployment. That has to be, should be a factor in everybody's mind. But in the final analysis, I don't think that you can utilize the procurement process to cure an unemployment problem. I think we have to attack the root cause of that, which is the economy and the need for more job producing stimulation and encouragement of more job producing activities everywhere, and all the rest.

But if you're speaking about the Mayback (?) Amendment, I have to tell you I do not favor repeal of it.

SENATOR LEVIN: Let me try to clarify, at least in my own mind, something you said this morning, which I think is really critical.

[Clip of Senator Tower reminding Senator Levin of the press of time.]

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SENATOR LEVIN: I just have one last question, if the time is there, actually. I want to go back to the Persian Gulf for one moment, because I think it is critical to the national interest. In fact, I think you said this morning you believe that the Persian Gulf area is vital to our national interests.

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Yes, I do.

SENATOR LEVIN: But you left me with two inconsistent positions, and perhaps that's in my mind, and, if so, could you clarify.

One position is that the commitment should be renewed. Nothing should be done to detract from the commitment to preserve our vital interests in the Persian Gulf. The second statement is we don't have the military capability to carry out that commitment. I view those as either watering down a commitment so that it has very little deterrent value, making it well nigh useless.....

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: Senator, I could possibly clear up the confusion by saying that I think the way in which the commitment was given was extraordinarily clumsy and ill-advised. I think that it was done not with advance consultation, as is, in my opinion, required, and not in such a way that indicated that the feeling of our military presence there was necessary and was a vital part of the interests of the countries concerned, as well as of ourselves and the Western world. But I also think that we can help to carry out that commitment with what we have. But I do not believe we have the strength now to insure the completion of that commitment. And I think we should do something about it as quickly as possible.

But I don't think there's any watering down involved or any -- I don't think there's any interpretation of global or geoeconomic theory or policy that could possibly conclude that we did not have a vital interest in the Arabian Gulf area.

SENATOR LEVIN: I'm not suggesting that. What I am suggesting is that when you say we don't have the power to carry out that commitment and at the same time believe it should be renewed or it should not be watered down, that you're giving very different signals, and that I believe you're giving a confusing signal which upon -- I hope upon further study you would not persist in.

SECRETARY-DESIGNATE WEINBERGER: I don't think so, Senator, because I think that it is perfectly possible and proper to recognize and be aware of the vital necessity and nature of a particular part of the world. And the whole Arabian Gulf area is clearly in that category.

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I do think that we have to recognize that while we do have an interest and can properly, with the consent of the countries involved, make that kind of commitment, we may have to take additional actions at home and additional encouragement to our NATO and other allies to help that be carried out. And it was in the latter connection that I was speaking. I think we do need additional actions to help us carry that commitment out conclusively and finally. I think we can make a start on it. I think we have. We already have some AWACS planes deployed there, and that, plus some other things, is what I think we have to do and continue to do, perhaps on an increasing scale if the countries involved desire it.

But I don't think there's anything confusing or inconsistent in recognizing the vital nature of that area of the world to ourselves and the Free World, and recognizing also that this recognition and this commitment involves a continuing commitment to increase our ability to help us this commitment out.

I do think that part of the problem is the way in which the commitment was given.

SENATOR LEVIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Weinberger. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR TOWER: Mr. Weinberger, thank you very much....